

**Congressman
Rob Simmons**

**Connecticut
2nd District**

- Armed Services Committee
- Military Procurement Subcommittee
- Military Personnel Subcommittee
- Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee
- Subcommittee on Railroads
- Subcommittee Highways & Transit
- Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
- Chairman for the Veterans' Subcommittee on Health



Dear Friends:

The last thing an individual who is fighting cancer needs is worry about the cost of chemotherapy. That is why a top priority of mine this session will be to work with my colleagues to change a provision in the new Medicare prescription drug law that would lower reimbursement rates for chemotherapy drugs.

Currently Medicare drugs are reimbursed to private practices at 95% of the average wholesale price. Under the new Medicare bill, reimbursement rates will drop to between 80-85%. Local oncologists have said that if this provision is not fixed they might have to send Medicare cancer patients, who make up about 60% of all patients, to Lawrence and Memorial Hospital for outpatient chemotherapy treatments. That will impact care because the hospital does not have the staff to treat such a flood of patients.

At one time chemotherapy treatment was administered in hospitals. New drugs and procedures have made it possible for cancer patients to receive treatment as outpatients. That is how more than 80% of all cancer drugs are administered. If reimbursements fall that will likely change. We cannot allow cancer care to be compromised at a time when we are winning the war against the disease and fewer people are dying from cancer today than 10 years ago.

Under the new Medicare law, certain chemotherapy drugs will be reimbursed under Medicare at rates lower than the prices doctors pay for them. This threatens the care of thousands of Medicare cancer patients throughout eastern Connecticut. The most expensive chemotherapy drugs can cost thousands of dollars a dose. Cancer patients cannot afford to have this provision remain in the law.

On three separate occasions, I wrote to Speaker of the House J. Dennis Hastert in opposition to these reductions. The Speaker has committed to creating a Working Group on Patient Access to Cancer Care. I will serve as a member of the group and we will write legislation to change any provisions in the Medicare bill that have a negative impact on cancer treatment. Speaker Hastert has told me he is committed to working with me and other Members who share my concern.

I will work with my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to correct this ill-advised cancer care provision. It is our responsibility to make sure that cancer patients have access to the important community care centers that have helped so many during what is clearly the most difficult struggle they have ever faced.